



ANNUAL REPORT

July 2022 - July 2023



Rue du Congrès 13

1000 Brussels

Tel +32 2 721 40 69

civilsocietyeurope.eu

contact@civilsocietyeurope.eu



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

EDITORS

Carla Pimentel Gonzales and Nastassia Maes

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Lila Sylviti



Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| PREFACE | 4 |
| WHO WE ARE | 8 |
| OUR MISSION | 10 |
| OUR MEMBERS | 12 |
| OUR INTERNAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE | 14 |
| FINANCES | 20 |
| OUR WORK | 22 |
| Civil Society State of the Union | 23 |
| A European Strategy for Civil Society | 25 |
| Defence of Democracy | 27 |
| Civic space and fundamental rights | 29 |
| The “Civil Society for EU” Elections Campaign | 31 |
| A rights-based Recovery Package | 33 |
| Supporting (civil society in) Ukraine | 35 |
| EnTrust Project | 37 |
| Accountability of civil society organisations | 39 |
| PARTNERSHIPS | 40 |



PREFACE

In the past year, Civil Society Europe (CSE) has seen many new opportunities and areas of activity and influence opening up. This is a huge testament to the dedication and efforts of CSE's Founding President, Jean-Marc Roirant, a truly inspirational leader with decades of commitment to promoting a unified voice for civil society in Europe and beyond. Through the election of a new President and Board in June 2023, together with our thematic Working Groups (WGs) that involve CSE members even more in our day-to-day activities, we are building on our legacy and going from strength to strength.

Based on the previous year's achievements in coordinating and involving civil society in the Conference on the Future of Europe, we have coordinated the crafting of key demands for the European Commission (EC)'s 2024 Work Programme and for elected and appointed EU decision-makers as a whole through the preparation of a Civil Society State of the Union 2023 report. The CS SOTEU report was presented ahead of the EC President's annual speech to the European Parliament (EP) in a well-attended launch event and widely disseminated to policymakers. It comprises the visions and recommendations of around 50 civil society organisations (CSOs) for a more democratic and socially and environmentally just EU.

We have also joined forces with one of our members, the Social Platform, to establish a coalition of over 50 EU networks of CSOs for the launch of a joint campaign on the role of civil society in the framework of the upcoming EP elections in 2024. The campaign calls notably for a European Civil Society Strategy and a framework for civil dialogue.

Other highlights include contributing through our WG on Civic Space and Fundamental Rights to the annual report on the implementation of the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights dedicated to civic space; drafting common country-specific recommendations with other CSOs for the EC's annual Rule of Law Cycle; preparing a joint, co-creating event with another one of our members, the European Civic Forum, on the development of an EU Civil Society Strategy; and organising numerous contributions and meetings on the EC's proposed Defence of Democracy Package. Moreover, we have worked to promote CSOs' involvement in decisions on funding, notably as regards the Recovery Package's implementation and the EU's support to rebuild Ukraine in the wake of Russia's invasion.

Finally, we have issued a report investigating CSOs' (dis)trust in EU institutions, the evolution of civil society's participation in EU governance and practices of civil dialogue at EU and Member States' levels, all within the Enlightened Trust in Governance (EnTrust) Project.

All of this was achieved thanks to the ever-increasing involvement of our members, as well as that of partner CSOs at EU and national levels, and the indispensable support of our funders who have placed great trust in our work.

Gabriella Civico

President of Civil Society Europe

WHO

WE ARE

Civil Society Europe (CSE) is the coordination of civil society organisations at the European (EU) level. We are currently composed of 22 platforms and networks of civil society organisations (CSOs) among the most representative CSOs active at EU level in a wide variety of areas, such as civic participation, education, social rights, environmental and animal rights, culture, transparency, international cooperation, volunteering, youth, patients' rights, the fight against racism and other forms of discrimination, anti-poverty, as well as the rights of persons with disabilities.

Through its membership, CSE reaches out to millions of people who are active in or supported by not-for-profit organisations and CSOs across the EU. CSE was created by several CSOs as a follow-up to the European Year of Citizens, and established as an international not-for-profit organisation in 2016. Since then, CSE has carved out a unique space as the coordination of CSOs which are interested in strengthening the role of civil society and civic space at EU level and is recognised as the point of reference for EU institutions on civil dialogue and civic space.

CSE works towards regenerating the European project around the shared values of equality, solidarity, inclusiveness and democracy.

OUR

MISSION

Through its work, Civil Society Europe (CSE) contributes to EU and national institutions' recognition of the essential role and value of independent and plural civil society organisations (CSOs) in building and nurturing a democratic society based on fundamental rights. We also work to create the conditions for the development of a strong and independent civil society voice and an effective, open, and structured civil dialogue at the EU level, as well as a thriving and enabling civic space across the Union.

CSE's mission, as established in the organisation's statutes and its founding Rome Declaration, is to:

- Create an enabling environment for horizontal exchanges among CSOs and movements across the EU;
- Promote civic space for civil society, based on fundamental rights, at all relevant levels;
- Ensure the renewal of European democracy, including by promoting transparency in decision-making and the participation of CSOs in EU decision-making processes;
- Strive for the recognition of CSOs by policymakers;
- Contribute to policy development on transversal issues of common interest, as agreed by CSE's membership.

OUR MEMBERS

Civil Society Europe gathers 22 platforms and networks of civil society organisations among the most representative CSOs active at EU level in a wide variety of areas.





**OUR
INTERNAL
GOVERNANCE
STRUCTURE**

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1 delegate for each member organisation



*Meets annually and adopts
a work programme, budget and accounts*



Elects every 2 years



BOARD

composed of 5 to 9 members



*Elects a President, 2 Vice-Presidents
and a Treasurer among its members*



Oversees

WORKING GROUPS

- Civil Society State of the Union, chaired by Judit Lantai (JEF Europe) & Gabriella Civico (CEV)
- Civic Space and Fundamental Rights, chaired by Giada Negri (ECF)
- Funding, chaired by Brikena Xhomaqi (LLLLP)
- Communication
- National Recovery and Resilience Plans task force

OUR BOARD

During our annual General Assembly (GA) in June 2023, Civil Society Europe (CSE)'s members elected a new Board made up of 9 individuals until June 2025. Also, as result of the adoption of revised CSE Statutes during the GA, the Board elected two Vice-Presidents in addition to electing a new President and a new Treasurer.



**GABRIELLA
CIVICO**

CSE President

Centre for
European
Volunteering



**PATRIZIA
HEIDEGGER**

CSE Vice-
President

Green 10



JUDIT LANTAI

CSE Vice-
President

Young European
Federalists



**GIUSEPPINA
TUCCI**

CSE Treasurer
Lifelong
Learning
Platform



**NICHOLAS
AIOSSA**

Transparency
International
EU



**LAURA DE
BONFILS**

Social Platform



MARTINA CORTI

SOLIDAR



**ALEXANDRINA
NAJMOWICZ**

European Civic
Forum



**PIOTR
SADOWSKI**

Volonteuropé

OUR SECRETARIAT



**CARLOTTA
BESOZZI**

Director



**NASTASSIA
MAES**

Policy &
Membership
Officer



MATTEO VESPA

Policy & Project
Officer

(As of September
2023)



CARLA PIMENTEL

Communications
& Events Officer

(As of October
2023)



**RICCARDO
ROSSELLA**

Coalition &
Campaign Officer

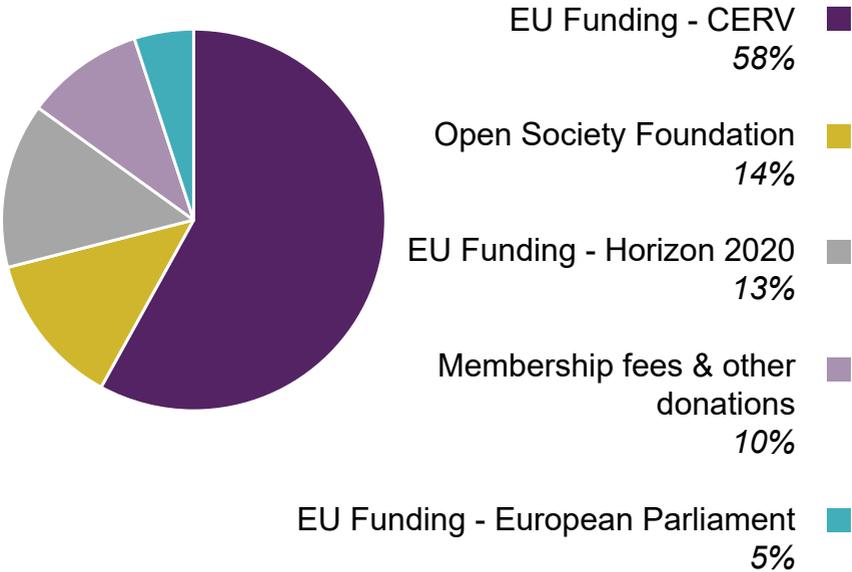
(Employed by Social
Platform, one of our
members)

FINANCES

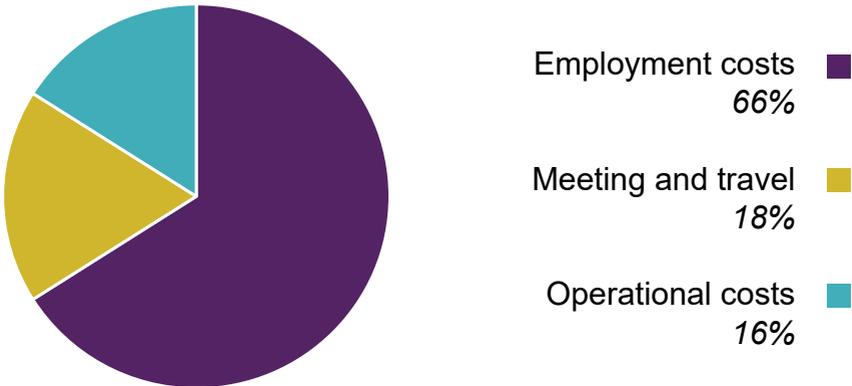
Civil Society Europe (CSE)'s 2022 accounts were approved unanimously during the General Assembly in June 2023, after being validated by an accountant and reviewed by an independent auditor. In 2022 we received and spent 185,496€.

Our income was constituted of membership fee contributions from our 22 members, we received funding from: the European Union's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme (operational grant), Horizon Europe (for the EnTrust Project), the Greens/EFA Group for a conference, and from the Open Society Foundations. All our funding was spent on advocacy work and awareness-raising activities, including the organisation of events, publications and position papers, capacity-building and exchanges among civil society organisations, as well as research and related dissemination activities.

INCOME 2022



EXPENSES 2022





OUR WORK

CIVIL SOCIETY STATE OF THE UNION

HIGHLIGHTS

After actively participating in the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) throughout 2021 and 2022, Civil Society Europe (CSE) published a paper titled “[Civil Dialogue in the EU – What’s next?](#)” in December 2022. This paper evaluates the CoFoE from our perspective as civil society organisations (CSOs) and identifies steps that need to be taken in the future to enable a more structured, open, transparent and constructive dialogue between CSOs, individual citizens and EU institutions, while recognising respective roles and prerogatives.

In early February 2023, we launched a new Working Group (WG) dedicated to following up on the CoFoE and to supporting civil society and citizens’ participation in EU democracy. In doing so, the WG is continuing the collaborative and ambitious work accomplished within the [Civil Society Convention for the Conference on the Future of Europe \(CSOCOFE\)](#) in 2021-2022.

This WG serves as a place to exchange and follow up on the CoFoE, and to monitor the adopted conclusions' implementation and developments, support civil society's participation in initiatives tied to EU democracy, while ensuring that marginalised groups' interests are represented and addressed. It also acts as a place for discussions and the development of proposals on citizens' involvement in the CoFoE's follow-up and in EU democracy, including but not limited to citizens' panels.

Our new WG's main output so far—the [Civil Society State of the Union 2023 report](#) (CS SOTEU)—comprises the visions and recommendations of around 50 CSOs for a more democratic and socially and environmentally just EU. The CS SOTEU report was completed in July 2023, after 5 months of collaboration. It is addressed to the EU institutions and Member States.

A EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

HIGHLIGHTS

Civil Society Europe (CSE) has continued to call for a coherent approach to an enabling civic space in the EU through the adoption of a dedicated strategy, echoing also the views of civil society organisations (CSOs) at the national level. In order to develop the building blocks for a European Civil Society Strategy, we co-organised in Brussels in December 2022 with one of our members, the European Civic Forum (ECF), a [European Convening on enabling, protecting and expanding Europe’s civic space](#). This key objective is also part of the [campaign](#) that we have developed with another one of our members, the Social Platform, in view of the 2024 European elections. Moreover, together with the ECF and CIVICUS, we hosted an event in March 2023 titled “[Protect Civil Society, Defend Democracy](#)”.

After the approval, in February 2022, of the [European Parliament \(EP\)'s resolution](#) calling for the establishment of a European status for CSOs, and long-standing calls from civil society, the European Commission (EC) launched a call for evidence and a public consultation to propose a legislative instrument tackling barriers faced by not-for-profit associations in cross-border work. CSE contributed to the EC's consultation and coordinated a [joint response](#) to the call for evidence, as well as an [individual contribution](#) based on a survey of CSOs conducted between September and October 2022. We [engaged](#) in talks with the EC and the researchers drafting the impact assessment. The result has been the proposal for a [Directive](#) establishing a new legal form called 'European Cross-Border Association – ECBA', currently under discussion by the co-legislators.

Elsewhere, CSE contributed to the mid-term review of the CERV programme that was discussed in the EP's Committee on Culture and Education with a [joint paper](#) with other CSOs and a meeting with the EP rapporteur and shadow rapporteur in May 2023. We also organised a meeting of our Working Group on Funding on issues that CSOs face throughout the different EU programmes.

DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY

HIGHLIGHTS

As a result of plans disclosed within the European Commission (EC) for a package on the Defence of Democracy, Civil Society Europe (CSE) published in October 2022 a preliminary position paper titled “[Building a resilient democracy and a strong and vibrant civic space](#)”, which we then presented to the Cabinets of EC Vice-Presidents Šuica and Jourová. As a follow-up, we were invited to contribute to the Opinion on [Democracy in the Digital Age](#) of the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies (EGE) published in June 2023.

Furthermore, CSE prepared with Philea, in April 2023, a [comprehensive contribution](#) to the EC’s call for evidence, including concrete suggestions, but also warning against a proposal for legislation on foreign covert interference establishing a register of foreign-funded organisations on

fundamental rights. CSE also coordinated meetings among civil society organisations (CSOs) with EC Vice-President Jourová and Commissioner Reynders, among others, and a joint statement signed by 230 CSOs in May 2023, titled “[EU Foreign Interference Law: Is Civil Society at Risk?](#)”. As a result of that statement, the EC decided to postpone the adoption of the package and to prepare an impact assessment of the aforementioned proposal.

CIVIC SPACE AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

HIGHLIGHTS

Civil Society Europe (CSE) contributed to the targeted consultation on the 2022 annual report on the application of the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights dedicated to civic space](#) in coordination with CSE's Working Group (WG) on Civic Space and Fundamental Rights. Our contribution includes a list of civic space indicators. We were also involved in the follow-up workshops organised by the European Commission (EC) in the first semester of 2023 on protecting, supporting and empowering civil society.

CSE's WG on Civic Space and Fundamental Rights also developed at the end of April 2023 [a contribution](#) highlighting main trends emerging from civil society contributions to the EC's 2023 Rule of Law Report, as well as concrete country-specific recommendations on civic space. This was followed by a meeting with the EC's Rule of Law Unit in advance of the publication of the report.

CSE was a speaker at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)'s annual event on Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law. We also contributed to the [EESC's hearing](#) in April 2023 on civil society support and funding in the area of fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy. CSE participated in July 2023 in the civil society dialogue with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights hosted by the EESC President; CSE facilitated the preparation of civil society's input for this event.

Throughout the period, CSE engaged with the EC, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU on the protection of fundamental rights in the EU's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing measures and contributed to [joint recommendations](#) with Philanthropy Europe Association (Philea), the European Center for Not-for-profit Law and Human Security Collective to clarify the application of anti-money laundering policy to public benefit foundations and not-for-profit organisations issued in February 2023. Together with Philea, we organised a webinar in June 2023 on the new anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing policy and its impact on civil society.

THE “CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EU” ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN

HIGHLIGHTS

In March 2023, Civil Society Europe (CSE) and one of its members, the Social Platform, started laying the groundwork for [Civil Society for EU](#), an EU-wide civil society campaign around the 2024 European Parliament elections that aims to counter the trends of shrinking civic space and limited opportunities for exchanges with policymakers. CSE and the Social Platform brought together a coalition of over 30 European civil society networks and platforms in a process of collectively shaping the campaign’s goals, targets, narrative and strategy.

In June 2023, the campaign coalition launched its [manifesto for better civic space and civil dialogue](#) and shared it with the main European political parties. The manifesto details the campaign’s call on the future

European institutions and leaders to strengthen civic space and civil dialogue all over the EU by adopting two overarching policy measures:

1. A European Civil Society Strategy, with a specific focus on:
 - ▶ A safe and enabling environment for civil society
 - ▶ An EU-wide mechanism to protect civil society, activists and defenders
 - ▶ Adequate funding for civil society actors
2. An inter-institutional agreement on civil dialogue.

A RIGHTS-BASED RECOVERY PACKAGE

HIGHLIGHTS

Civil Society Europe (CSE) has continued to coordinate civil society organisations (CSOs)' advocacy for their involvement in the design and implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs), following [CSE's guidance note and reports](#) outlining challenges on the ground as well as good practices. As the mid-term review of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) was approaching, we [contributed in December 2022 to the RRF's evaluation](#) via the European Commission (EC)'s call for evidence. CSE's task force on the NRRPs held a meeting to contribute to the European Parliament's review of the RePower EU regulation and strengthen civil society's involvement. We also disseminated information to CSOs on the EC's guidance note to Member States and on the annual national events on the NRRPs.

Furthermore, in November 2022, together with the European Environmental Bureau, we organised a [conference on 'RebuildUkraine' and on civil dialogue](#). This conference included an interactive workshop, which was chaired and moderated by Maria Teresa Fábregas, Director of the Recovery and Resilience Task Force II of the EC's Secretariat-General, on supporting CSOs' engagement, including in the design and monitoring of the RRF.

SUPPORTING (CIVIL SOCIETY IN) UKRAINE

HIGHLIGHTS

Civil Society Europe (CSE) strongly condemns Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine and continues to stand with Ukraine, including Ukrainian civil society.

In November 2022, we organised a [high-level conference on 'RebuildUkraine' and civil dialogue](#) with one of our members, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB). The conference gathered 80 people from EU and Ukrainian civil society organisations (CSOs) and EU institutions. The first part of the conference was dedicated to a panel discussion on how Ukrainian and EU civil society can be supported in the processes for peace building, reconciliation, reconstruction and the rebuilding of democracy in Ukraine.

The high-level conference followed up on CSE's joint statement with the EEB from June 2022; in it, we [urged the European Commission to guarantee a meaningful role for civil society in the 'RebuildUkraine' reconstruction platform.](#)

The statement was signed by 160 CSOs across the EU and Ukraine, working on a diverse spectrum of issues.

EnTrust PROJECT

HIGHLIGHTS

Enlightened Trust in Governance (EnTrust) is a Horizon 2020 project that studies trust and distrust in governance and measures to support sustainable and democratic societies in Europe. The project's consortium, led by the University of Siegen, comprises Civil Society Europe (CSE), as well as the Universities of Copenhagen, Siena, Warsaw, Masaryk University in Brno, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens, and the Institute of Philosophy and Social Theory of the University of Belgrade.

- To present the consortium's research results to policymakers and civil society organisations (CSOs), CSE drafted Policy Briefs on "The Role of Democratic Social movements in Trust & Distrust building" (August 2022) and "Building Trust and Distrust in the Media: The Role of Disinformation and Media Freedom" (June 2023).



- ▶ In February 2023, we organised an [online expert roundtable](#) on the topic of trustworthy media in the context of (partisan) disinformation, hate speech, media freedom, and human rights. In June 2023, we organised an [online roundtable](#) to discuss adult and youth (dis)trust attitudes towards governments and institutions in the run-up to the European elections.
- ▶ CSE also drafted a [report](#) on practices of enhanced trust in governance. It explores the conditions of CSOs' trust in EU institutions, the evolution of civil society's participation in EU governance, and trustworthy practices of civil dialogue at EU and Member States' levels. The report is based on desk research, a survey of European CSOs that involved 48 organisations active in 23 policy fields, and focus groups with 15 CSOs.
- ▶ We launched a [creative youth contest](#) to encourage young people aged 13 to 19 years of age to creatively express their vision for the future of Europe.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Within its multiannual work programme, Civil Society Europe (CSE) has committed to organising training sessions to reinforce civil society organisations' accountability. At the end of the four-year-long cycle (2025), we will constitute an online manual with resources and good practices that can be useful for organisations either to reinforce their own codes of conduct and/or other policies, as well as their practices, or to serve as a reference. Moreover, this will also help to increase CSE's own accountability. As CSE, we are constantly seeking to improve democratic participation and civic space and to enhance civil society's role. We also have to see how civil society can be a role model and both reinforce and demonstrate its accountability.

In December 2022, we organised an accountability training session on codes of conduct. In May 2023, we organised a session on gender mainstreaming in collaboration with the European Women's Lobby. In June 2023, we organised a session on post-growth/degrowth in collaboration with the European Environmental Bureau.

PARTNERSHIPS

Civil Society Europe (CSE) has continued to strengthen its collaboration with the European Economic and Social Committee's Civil Society Organisations' Group, also known as Group III.

We have also established a partnership agreement with the Philanthropy Europe Association (Philea) to cooperate on issues related to civic space and the rule of law.

